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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000866

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SUBJECT: ASSEMBLY MEMBER RECOUNTS THIRD TERM DEFEAT

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Representative Temi Harriman (PDP - Delta State) of the National Assembly told the Consul General bribes and strong-arm tactics whittled at but did not break the opposition that defeated the President's third term push. Harriman suspects there will be additional attempts to extend Obasanjo's term and conceded the opposition coalition remained vulnerable to financial seduction. Harriman claimed the President's domineering style of governance and his arrogance led to the defeat. Predicting a major exodus from the PDP, she stated she would leave the party to seek a Senatorial seat under the Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD) banner in 2007. Moving closer to home, Ms. Harriman said there was sympathy even among her Itsekiri kith for recent Ijaw militant action in the Delta. End summary.

CREATIVE MANEUVERS TO PUSH THIRD TERM

¶2. (C) Representative Temi Harriman, National Assembly member from Warri South, Delta State, recounted the events leading to the demise of the third term amendment. Harriman said large sums of money were offered to both Senators and Representatives in exchange for votes for the amendment. At first, she said she was offered 50 million naira (390,000 USD) by the President's minions in the House. When she declined and as the Obasanjo team grew desperate for votes, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Group Managing Director Kupolokun called offering her partial ownership of an oil block. When she declined, Harriman was finally threatened, but again refused to budge.

¶3. (C) Ms. Harriman said rumors that Vice President Atiku and former military head-of-state Babangida offered equally large payoffs to buy votes against the President were not true. However, she stated that significant lesser amounts were passed to many anti-third term legislators to fortify them in the face of the onslaught of enticements and invectives coming from the President's corps.

¶4. (C) While fully enjoying the defeat of the amendment, Harriman conceded the coalition against Obasanjo was fragile. She estimated 143 opposition representatives in the National House of Assembly, but was not sure of the number because a formal vote count was not taken. (Note: The third term amendment failed to garner enough voice votes to continue debate. The amendment was never formally voted on. End note.) There were even more in opposition but Harriman said

the coalition lost ten members the week before the vote when bribes were delivered to some of the lawmakers. She claimed that of the 143 who stood firm in the House, 109 were ANPP representatives, mostly from the North. Given the animus against Obasanjo in Northern Nigeria, these lawmakers could not be enticed to vote for the third term. To a certain extent, the choice was between Obasanjo's money or their status in their local community, even their physical well-being. Most of them chose to protect their status and well-being, she postulated. Shortly after the amendment failed, Tony Anenih, a longtime Obasanjo loyalist known for his coarse methods of persuasion, invited many leaders of the anti-third term group in the House to dinner. Harriman declined the invitation, seeing it as an attempt to break their ranks. She was upset that many of the other opposition members cozied up to the President's men so soon after the vote. Although some opposition members feel Obasanjo's ambitions are blunted for good, concluded Harriman, others are certain there will be further attempts at term extension and she saw Anenih's prandial invitation as part of such a scheme. Because of these, Harriman stated some of the anti-extensionists have discussed giving 2-3 million naira each to members of the coalition who seem to be flagging and who might be susceptible to inducements from the Obasanjo camp. She suggested the funds would come from the same source that paid some of the anti-third termers before the vote - namely Vice President Atiku and former head-of-state Babangida.

"ENTITLED" PRESIDENT MISLED, PDP NOW IN DISARRAY

15. (C) Ms. Harriman said she supported the President in the past, and fought against moves to impeach him in 2002.

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However, over time he seemed to have acquired a messiah complex, she said. This arrogance, and underestimating the sentiment against term extension, managed to do what the various opposition factions could not do without identifying a common enemy -- unite them. Obasanjo's people were afraid to tell him the truth about the mounting opposition against the third term. A few days preceding the bill's demise, 41 senators stood against the amendment. Obasanjo's men who were lobbying the National Assembly became frantic and were working hard to persuade members their way. Obasanjo's men were openly talking about defeat while at the National Assembly but apparently they never told Obasanjo. One Obasanjo insider, according to Harriman, told her that none of his aides dared to tell Obasanjo the whole truth. No one dared to tell him that he did not have the numbers although they knew the measure would not pass, said Harriman. Not to incur his displeasure, they intentionally told him that they could win. Because of his aides' mendacity, Obasanjo let the measure go to the floor. He still thought he would win while his aides remained silent, knowing the measure was doomed, Harriman claimed.

16. (C) Representative Harriman predicted the People's Democratic Party (PDP), stressed to the point of fracture by the struggle over term extension, would ultimately divide. She said no reconciliation was possible. Harriman said the PDP National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting that closely followed the defeat did not even acknowledge the attempt at term extension, let alone explore ways to mend the Party's internal differences. The PDP would split, predicted Harriman, with most opposition members joining the new Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD). She planned to run for a Senate seat from Delta State under the ACD banner.

17. (C) Harriman said Obasanjo's reverse and the resultant damage to the PDP has buoyed Vice President Atiku's political fortunes, as those disenchanted with the President's maneuvers are turning to the Vice President. Obasanjo is likely to back a southern candidate in an attempt to block

Atiku and Babangida, but the South-South and South-East are disorganized and will be hard-pressed to block the northerners' ambitions.

GROWING IJAW SYMPATHY IN HARRIMAN'S HOME DISTRICT

18. (C) Harriman, an Itsekiri from Warri SW, Delta State, then turned to ongoing strife in the Niger Delta. The Itsekiris are not actively militant like the Ijaws. Itsekiris lack the economic capacity, the numbers, and do not have the cultural inclination for sustained militant action, Harriman claimed. However, she has noted a growing sympathy for the Ijaw militant actions among her Itsekiri constituents. More ominously, the Itsekiris are realizing the Ijaw militants are profiting from their misbehavior. Despite the recent establishment of President Obasanjo's Niger Delta commission, Harriman questioned whether anything would be done to repair the damage in the Delta soon enough to stave another round of significant militant action.

COMMENT

19. (C) Representative Harriman was relaxed and candid as she recounted the third term battle. Her characterization of the opposition coalition as a fragile amalgam of various interests indicates that this coalition may not survive long in the absence of a common threat. Her remarks about the health of the PDP seem accurate. Conflict within the party is tumescent and shows no sign of abating. As things stand now, the third term attempt and Obasanjo's distaste for his Vice President loom as coffin nails for the party. We also share Harriman's concern for the Niger Delta and her constituency, Warri, Delta State. Warri was the scene of electoral violence in 2003. The city is more turbulent now than it was three years ago. It will become even more so as election season gets underway. End comment.
BROWNE